



Police probe alleged VT1 billion misappropriation on Pentecost

By Hilaire Bule Oct 3, 2023 0



Leader of the RDP and current MIPU Minister, Jay Ngwele, in Parliament last week. Photo: Doddy Morris

By Hilaire Bule



Police investigators have initiated interviews with key members of the Rural Development Party (RDP) on Pentecost, beginning last Thursday.

According to police sources, investigators have taken statements from RDP members on Pentecost regarding the alleged misappropriation of VT1 billion for the Ambae road project during Mr. Ngwele's tenure as the Minister of Infrastructure and Public Utilities (MIPU) in the Bob Loughman coalition government.

Among the prominent figures of RDP on Pentecost are the presidents of sub-committees. The RDP had managed to secure two out of four seats on the island.

The Commission of Inquiry (Col) Final Report on the VT1 billion Ambae Road Projects revealed that Mr. Ngwele allegedly instructed the purchase of 34 water tanks.

The Col findings also disclosed that these tanks were distributed on Ambae and Pentecost, but government employees were unaware of their distribution.

“Jane Tari, a former cabinet staff member, confirmed that these water tanks were distributed within the former minister's political domain in West Ambae. She also recalled that a number of water tanks were even sent to the Pentecost electoral constituency to support candidates associated with Mr. Ngwele's party during preparations for snap elections,” stated the Col report. The Col Report alleged that Mr. Ngwele also issued directives for material procurement for the so-called West Ambae “Community” projects, with a substantial amount of cement bags also listed.

“It is noteworthy that a significant portion of these cement bags was obtained from suppliers like Wilco, Leon Hardware, and Thai Viet Hardware, all located in Port Vila. Interestingly, both Wilco and Thai Viet confirmed rare deliveries of these materials by their staff. Instead, they both stated that it was former Minister Ngwele and Samuel Viranehnehe who most of the time personally collected the materials,” the Col Report stated.

The Col further alleged that they discovered several unpaid invoices for various materials personally ordered and collected by Mr. Ngwele at the time of their report.

The Commission, led by Mr. Willie Jimmy, also claimed that Mr. Ngwele unilaterally proceeded to sign a contract for the construction of Teouma, Abattoir, and Erangorango roads. It is alleged that this decision was made without adhering to the essential provisions outlined in the Government Contracts and Tenders Act [CAP. 245], and there was no evidence that the contract obtained no objection of the State Law Office.

“Curiously, it was also revealed that one of the former minister's private houses is situated within the vicinity of the Erangorango road end, as well as a property belonging to Mr. Dinh Van Thu.

“Such circumstances raise justifiable suspicions about the potential influence of personal interests on the decision-making approach,” the report stated.

The Col recommends that legal action be taken against Mr. Ngwele for breaching the Government Contracts and Tenders Act [CAP. 245] and that he be banned from holding public office.

“Given the gravity of the misconduct, Mr. Ngwele should be barred from holding any public office pursuant to the Leadership Code. Mr. Ngwele should also reimburse any misappropriated funds,” the Col recommended.

The Daily Post attempted to reach Mr. Ngwele for comments, but the efforts were unsuccessful.

Previously, Government Public Relations Officer (PRO) Antoine Malsungai who used to be Mr. Ngwele's PRO, stated that the government has no comment while the issue is under police investigation.



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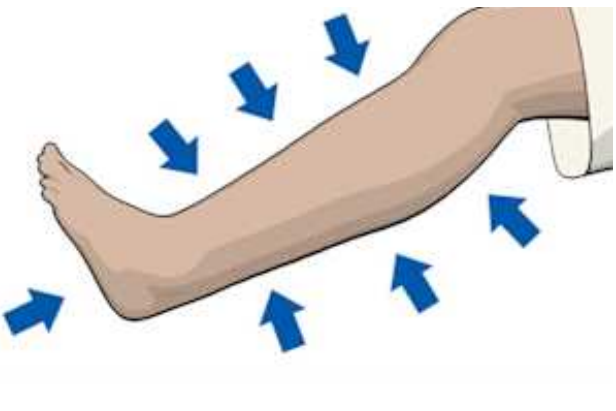
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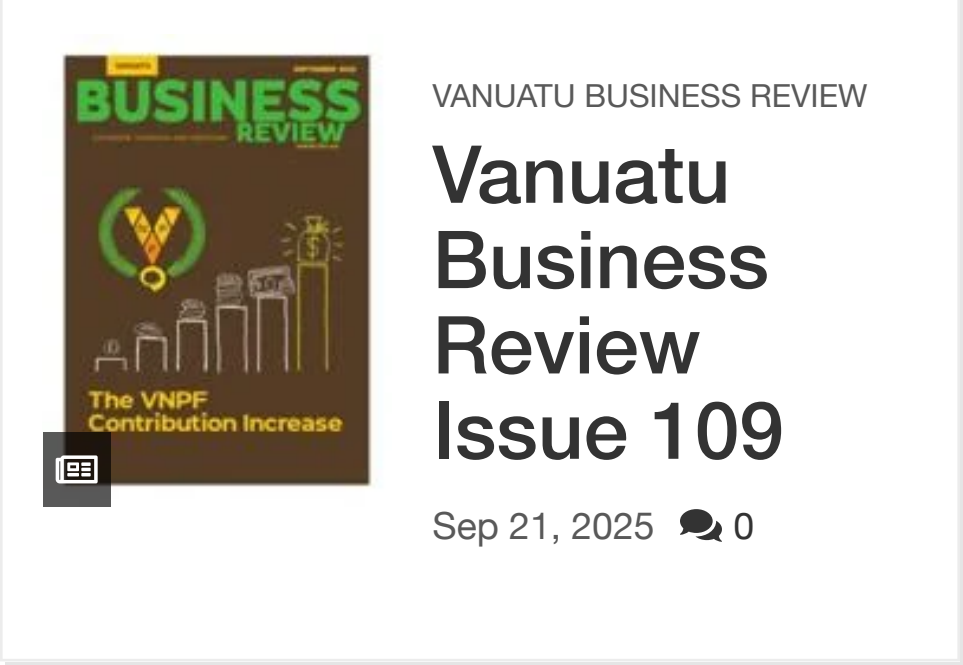
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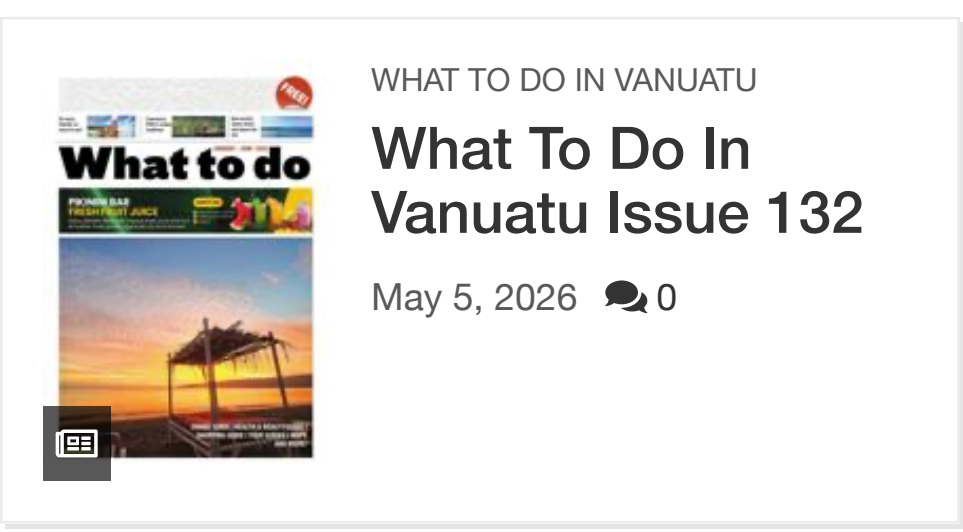
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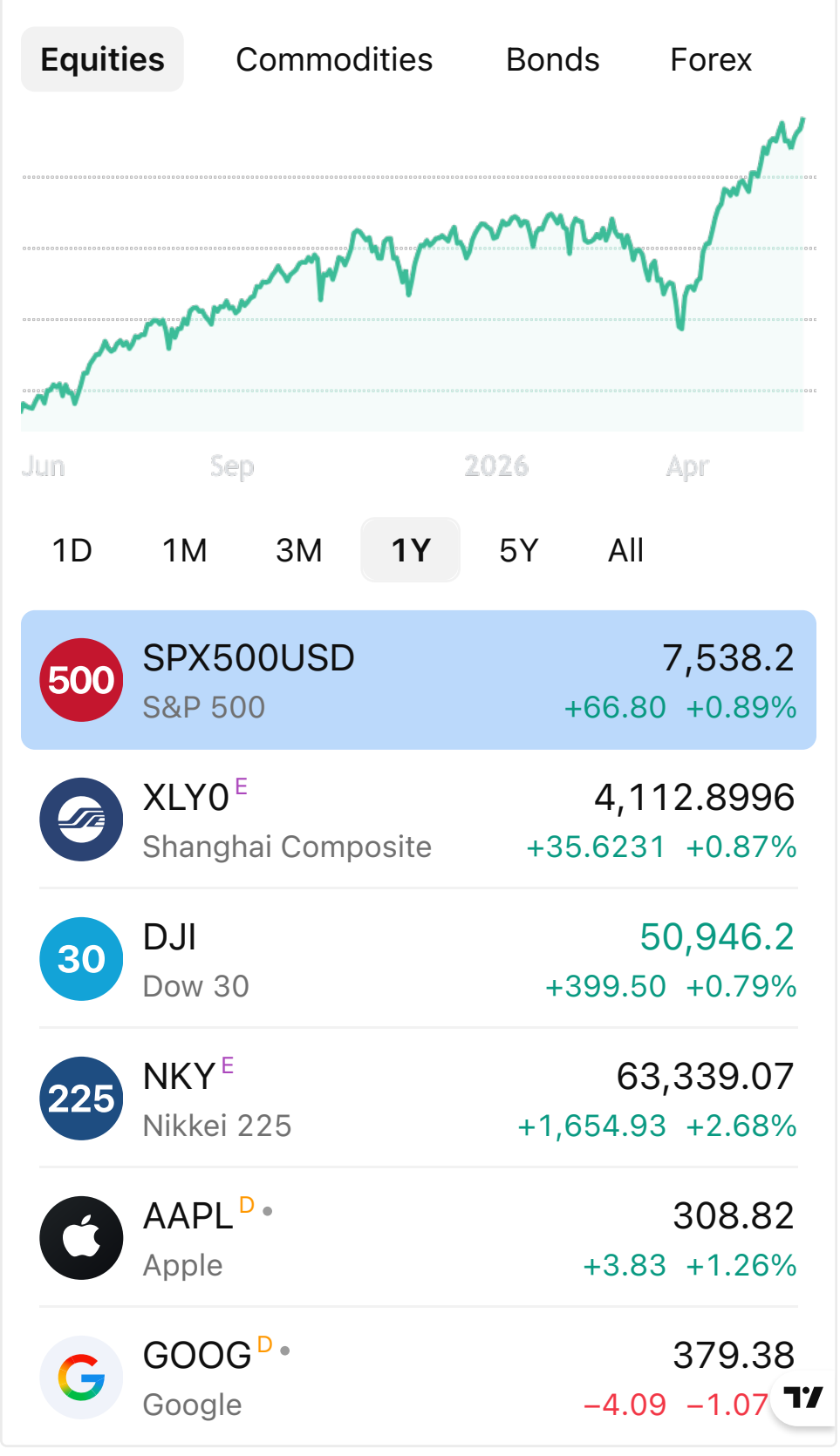
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